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SIPDIS

State for NEA/PPD (MLUSSENHOP, CBOURGEOIS), NEA/ARN,
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SUBJECT: IBB's Radio Sawa an initial hit among the
youth in Jordan

1. (Summary) The experimental broadcast of IBB's Radio Sawa, which offers an attractive mix of Arabic and American music, became an instant hit among Jordan's young, who are the main target audience and the majority of the population. Whether this popularity will continue now that Radio Sawa has started news and feature broadcasting remains to be seen. There is a widespread misconception that Radio Sawa is a private enterprise and not a U.S. government broadcast. (End summary)

Music attracts youth

2. As early as the experimental broadcasting stage, the attractive mix of Arabic and American music broadcast on IBB's Radio Sawa became an instant hit among Jordan's youth who are the majority of the population in this country. The diversity of Radio Sawa's audience appears to transcend wealth and education barriers, since the radio can be heard in modest taxicabs and barbershops, fast food establishments such as Burger King, as well as plush health fitness clubs. Whether Radio Sawa's popularity will continue now that more extensive news coverage will be aired on the station remains to be seen.

Not to be too sanguine

3. The success of the experimental broadcast should not be confused with support for the U.S. The conviction that U.S. Middle East policy is biased against the Arabs remains strong in Jordan and it gives rise to strong feelings of injustice and anger. A PA contact said that a shop which he frequents was playing Radio Sawa not realizing that it was an American station. When this was explained to him he immediately changed to another station.

Cynicism regarding news broadcasts

4. Centrist, influential among the elite, the English daily Jordan Times reported on April 30 that the "public is prepared for bias" in the news broadcasts of Radio Sawa and the proposed U.S. satellite channel. In the article, Dr. Nabil Al-Sharif, Chief Editor of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour suggested that Arab negativity to the U.S. is a reaction to U.S. policy, not its packaging. He said: "The U.S. must exercise fair-handedness in the Middle East in order to prove itself." This sentiment has been echoed in opinion columns in Jordan's Arabic papers. GNEHM